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THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

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Letter dated 6 February 1997 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to my two previous letters to the President of the Security Council (S/1997/32 and S/1997/83) and upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement issued by the Sudanese National Council for Child Welfare on 20 January 1997. The statement calls for concentrated international action for the protection and safe return of the Sudanese children detained by the Ethiopian Tigray army.

I request that the text of the present letter and its annex be translated and circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under the item entitled "Promotion and protection of the rights of children", and of the Security Council.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Elfatih ERWA
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

A call for concerted international action for the protection and safe return of the Sudanese children detained by the Ethiopian Tigray army, issued by the National Council for Child Welfare of the Sudan on 20 January 1997

It is with deep concern and profound indignation that the National Council for Child Welfare of the Sudan addresses the international community at large on the tragic events that have severely affected the child population of southern Blue Nile State as a result of the recent military aggression launched by the Ethiopian Tigray troops against the Sudanese territory of Eastern Sudan.

Confirmed reports available to the Sudanese authorities have indicated that, owing to the atmosphere of fear and terror created by the invaders, approximately 3,000 to 4,000 innocent Sudanese citizens have been forced out of their homes in Kurmuk, Gissan and other surrounding towns and villages. It is evident that the majority of the missing are women and children. These children are facing tragic and dire conditions following the spate of terror inflicted upon them by the invaders; indeed, they have been subjected to war trauma.

In the prevailing conditions, it is undoubtedly difficult to assess the safety and welfare of these citizens. Moreover, eyewitnesses among those who were able to arrive safely have confirmed that the invading Ethiopian Tigray army has captured 160 students, half of them girls, in addition to around 15 male and female teachers during the normal course of study at school. All of these innocent children and their teachers have been taken by force to an unknown and undeclared destination inside Ethiopian territory.

These acts of cruelty and atrocities committed by the Ethiopian Tigray troops, against innocent Sudanese children in particular, are a clear violation of all international humanitarian law, including the rules of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1990, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of June 1993 and the final document of the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in September 1995. It is ironic to observe that Ethiopia is a signatory and party to all of these instruments and documents of international humanitarian law.

The National Council for Child Welfare of the Sudan urges the international community at large and the international organizations concerned with the respect and preservation of the rights of the child in particular to shoulder their responsibility to effectively ensure the necessary protection and safe return of all missing children detainees and to renounce the threat and use of violence by the Ethiopian Tigray troops aimed at terrorizing the innocent children in the area.

The National Council for Child Welfare calls upon concerned international organizations and institutions to promptly undertake a thorough investigation into the atrocities committed by the invaders and bring those responsible for these practices to justice.